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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2014
TAGS: PHUM PREL VE
SUBJECT: HOW DARE YOU! GOV REACTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d)
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Summary

¶11. (C) Venezuelan government officials reacted angrily to the release of the Human Rights Report February 28. Vice President Juan Vicente Rangel said the USG lacked "moral authority" to talk about human rights, and accused the USG of being the country that most violated human rights, alleging "thousands" of deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq. Rangel and Human Rights Ombudsman German Mundarain said the report had been politically manipulated, with Mundarain suggesting the U.S. end game is to condemn Venezuela at the United Nations. We suspect that no one in the GOV had actually read the report before Rangel and Mundarain made these comments. Movimiento Quinta Republica Deputy Saul Ortega, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, refuted some of the specific observations in the report in a conversation with poloff. End Summary.

Moral Authority

¶12. (U) Venezuela's Vice President, Juan Vicente Rangel, reacted angrily to the release of the Human Rights Report (HRR), releasing a "declaration" on February 28. Rangel repeated his condemnation later, telling reporters the USG did not have "moral authority" to judge other country's human rights records. He asserted that the USG tortures prisoners, maintains concentration camps, and reiterated that the U.S. is plotting to kill Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Rangel said the USG was "the government that most violates human rights, in its own country and in the world," by "killing thousands of people, as in Iraq and Afghanistan." He called the report itself, "lies, more falsehoods and more hypocrisy."

Demonization

¶13. (U) Human Rights Ombudsman German Mundarain called the HRR the "appetizer" of a campaign to demonize Venezuela with an eye towards convincing the United Nations (UN) Third Committee to condemn Venezuelan human rights abuses. Echoing Rangel, Mundarain told reporters March 1 that the USG lacked legal and moral authority to judge Venezuela. He asserted that the HRR did not meet UN standards, because it did not mention economic and social rights, and because it did not make recommendations. Mundarain criticized the USG of wanting to "assassinate" the Kyoto Treaty and the International Criminal Court, by not only refusing to sign them, but working to undermine their implementation. He further accused the USG of violating the Geneva Convention against torture in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. Defending Venezuela, Mundarain asserted that the human rights situation had improved in the last year, without specifying how.

Situation Improving

¶14. (C) Movimiento Quinta Republica (MVR) Deputy Saul Ortega, President of the National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee, told poloff March 2 that he had not read the report. Nonetheless, he said he did not agree that the human rights situation had deteriorated. Told that the report cited shortcomings in the independence of the judiciary and the control of the independent media, Ortega blamed the opposition. Had the opposition been willing to participate in the naming of the new Supreme Court justices, Ortega said, there would have been more balance. Ortega claimed that when judges are fired, it is because the "people" have complained about them, and not for political reasons. Ortega insisted that the judiciary had become much better in the last few years due to investment in technology and facilities, asserting that for this reason an evaluation that the justice

system had deteriorated was unjustified.

Comment

15. (C) The GOV's reaction to the Human Rights Report was as expected, although it is the first time we have seen a "declaration" emanating from the Vice President's office. The tendency to respond to USG statements, comments or activities with more forceful criticism of the USG has become a standard tactic of Rangel and the GOV. There may be more commentary or criticism of the report once a Spanish translation becomes available. (It is likely that only a few have bothered to read the English version now available.) For the moment, however, the GOV seems content to use offense as defense.

Brownfield